

## PUBLIC

### THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON TASWATER OWNERSHIP MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER 2017.

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**Mr WES FORD**, DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, WAS CALLED VIA TELEPHONE, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Ms Armitage) - Good morning, Wes. Thank you for agreeing to speak with us again. Would you like to begin with a statement or would you prefer to go straight to questions?

**Mr FORD** - Can I take you to your statement on the bottom of page 8 of the transcripts where you say -

We did get a submission from several bakeries but one in particular said that he had contacted the EPA with regard to the Grease Guardian. I am sure you are familiar ...

My assumption is that evidence was provided by a Peter Elliot of Elphin Continental Cakes. I would like to clear that up. He spoke to Glen Naphthali. He told Glen he believed they were prudent use, not the other way round. Glen has advised his comment to Mr Elliot on 3 August words to the effect, 'If it is approved for use in other states, I do not see why it wouldn't be suitable for use in Tasmania.' Glen goes on to say, 'I don't even know what PDI or ASE are.'

We are not the regulator of trade waste and we don't have technical experience in this area. In the meantime, we have done a little bit of digging ourselves to try to determine where devices like Grease Guardians are approved in Australia and how they are approved. If you look at places like Sydney Water or South Australia, these sorts of devices are mentioned as to what can be approved for use, particularly in the co-treatment of trade waste, the intent being seeking to eliminate as much grease from the trade waste before it enters the trade waste system.

SA Water offers fairly extensive information on how to deal with devices like Grease Guardian, as does Sydney Water and also City West Water, Melbourne, which also deals with alternative grease traps. There is a significant amount of information in the public arena that people can access to form their own views about what they think could or couldn't be used in their discussions with TasWater.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Wes, following your evidence TasWater provided us with some information. It was suggested the clarifications or your situation with grease traps, Grease Guardians and trade waste may be different following some further information you or your office received, I am assuming from TasWater. Is there some updated information you can share with the committee?

**Mr FORD** - At the end of the day, I think Mike Brewster and I are talking about the same sort of issue. What TasWater needs to do is minimise the amount of grease and oils that enter the wastewater treatment system from whatever source. Those sources will come under three categories - the domestic sector, the catering sector and the industrial sector. TasWater works fairly closely with the industrial sector because it is a much smaller group of people with a much higher volumes of waste. They are in a much better position to work with those industrials to

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characterise each individual waste input and tailor their trade waste agreements to those organisations.

Pretty much all they can do in the residential sector is have a community awareness campaign about the inappropriateness of tipping fat and grease down your sink when you are doing the washing up and those things.

What they have been seeking to do with the food industry sector is to have that whole sector lift its standards. Their approach has been through the use of grease traps. At the end of the day, having a grease trap on the premises is a tried and true method where people have to take responsibility for cleaning it out themselves. When they have a block, they have to clean it out.

Mike and I discussed this at length, and I can understand where his concern comes from. If you put front-end devices in and people can turn them off or they become ineffective, the grease still ends up in the trade waste area. It is a conversation that ends up being across a whole network. I have talked to Mike about it - across a whole network. the network could not support everybody going to Grease Guardians but could support a few people going to Grease Guardians or other technologies. When you start to delve into this and you look at what is available, already being either tested or used in Australia, a range of different devices are designed to remove grease and oils from the wastewater discharged into the sewer system.

I do not think we are necessarily at a significant point of difference. I am not the regulator and we don't have technical expertise to make a judgment about whether they would be an effective tool in isolation or in combination with something else.

**Ms RATTRAY** - If you are not the regulator, is TasWater the regulator and they are just complying with the national standard? Is that the approach there?

**Mr FORD** - Under the water and sewerage legislation, the minister responsible for trade waste regulation is Mr Rockliff. The actual regulator on the ground is TasWater. So the way the regulations operate, TasWater can enter into trade waste agreements and TasWater can take action against people in relation to inappropriate discharges. TasWater can direct people to install certain equipment in accordance with the way those regulations operate.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Are they working under national compliance obligations?

**Mr FORD** - I am not sure I would say it in that sense because I am not sure what you are referring to in terms of the national guidance.

**Ms RATTRAY** - We signed up to the National Competition Policy. That covers a wide range of initiatives and compliance obligations - I say 'all states', but in most states because we know Western Australia does things a lot differently. That is where I am coming from in that regard. I will follow that up with the department. Thank you. That is obviously Mr Rockliff's area, so he must have someone in some department speaking with TasWater.

**Mr FORD** - The person within the department who carries the expertise in this area is Stephen Apted. Stephen works in the Water and Marine Resources Division. He has been involved in the water and sewer reform process from its outset. He is the principal policy advisor advising Mr Rockliff with matters associated with National Water Reform.

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Where you are talking about things like COAG arrangements in terms of National Water Reform policy, yes, Tasmania is a signatory, but it doesn't go into the level of detail of dealing with things such as those we are talking about at the moment.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank you, Wes, it was good to get that clarified and to put it on the public record.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Have you had a chance to look to the Productivity Commission's report, Wes?

**Mr FORD** - No, I haven't even had a chance to pick it up.

**Mr VALENTINE** - That's okay. I will read a statement from it and I am interested in your comment, if you have one. Obviously you may not care to comment. On page 203 of that report, section 6.6, it says that environmental regulations should be more outcomes-focused. There is another subsection on page 202 that asks, 'Could some regulations be more flexible?' They make a statement -

There are likely to be cheaper ways to achieve water quality outcomes than requiring utilities to undergo costly investments to meet tighter wastewater discharge standards. Treatment costs can increase quite rapidly when moving from basic treatment to more advanced forms ... ACIL Allen Consulting (2014) found that many low cost technical solutions to reduce wastewater pollution have already been implemented in New South Wales.

Are you aware of any of those sorts of solutions?

**Mr FORD** - A range of wastewater treatment solutions are available to treat a range of effluent. So, you either look at things that are going to be biological-based, mechanical-based or a combination of the two. I can't tell you whether we've been directly looking at specific technologies. We operate in a regulatory sense. TasWater gives us information to determine what an appropriate discharge to the environment is, recognising we have four different sets of discharge environments: the marine environment, the estuary environment, the freshwater environment and onto land. The discharge requirements onto each of those will be different depending on the circumstances. We work with TasWater to determine an appropriate set of parameters for a particular environment and then let TasWater work out the appropriate technology they wish to employ is.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Thank you. You have to stick within the strictures of any act that exists in Tasmania - I appreciate that - but I thought I would just get your comment.

**CHAIR** - I think everything has been cleared up, Wes. Would you like to make any further comment?

**Mr FORD** - No.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for your input this morning. We really appreciate it.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**